

Concentration

How surprised we would be while watching our favourite mystery program on television if the main character forgot his lines. We would be irate because the whole illusion of theatre would be destroyed by an actor who broke character.

It is rare in professional theatre for trained actors to lose their concentration and character. Actors are trained to maintain character regardless of the situation.

This is not true of amateur productions. Amateur actors often seem more interested in themselves and not the characters they portray. Such circumstances lead to shallow and unconvincing productions.

You likely noticed that when working on your powers of observation that you were required to concentrate as well. They go hand-in-hand. Not only in preparation work but in actual stage work it is imperative to concentrate. When an actor concentrates on an object or person, the audience will give attention to those same items. If you don't believe this stand in the cafeteria at noon and stare up at the balcony. See how many individuals will gaze up at whatever you are staring at.

Simple Concentration #1

Students remain seated at their desks with pencil and paper in front of them. Explain that they are responsible for buying groceries for the week. Tell them that they cannot write down the list until after I have given it to them. In order to retain students must concentrate completely.

List A apples, bananas, pears, grapes, lemons,
 oranges, limes, kiwis, grapefruit, cherries.

Once the list has been given allow students to write out their answers. Discuss the success rate. Students should fair well because there were no distractions and all of the words are related.

Moderate Concentration #2

This exercise is slightly harder because this time we will add interference into the mix. As students hear the grocery list they will count as a group in unison from 1 to whatever number they can achieve. The counting should be loud enough to be heard clearly.

List B paper, pencils, pens, erasers, glue, staples,
 white-out, rulers, binders, paper-clips

Once the list has been given allow students to write out their answers. Discuss the success rate. Students should have had a bit of trouble here. The disadvantage was the oral distraction. The advantage was the similarity of the words in terms of their association with each other.

Difficult Concentration #3

This exercise is even harder. This time we will add 2 sources of interference into the mix. Students will continue to count as a television blasts out a musical/visual lesson of the different nations of the world (Animaniacs - Countries of the World). The result will be a visual and audio confusion. Remember, the counting should be loud enough to be heard clearly above the din.

List C White Swan toilet paper, Palmolive Dish Detergent, Nike Sneakers size 9, Windex with vinegar, Nestle Crunch Bar, 1 pound of yellow wax beans, a bag of M&M peanuts, 1 liter of Northumberland Skim Milk, 2 cans of Habitant Pea Soup with smoked ham, a can of Mountain Dew

This list is incredibly hard. Do word associations to assist, and two sources of interference. This would be the ultimate in concentration.

List D Bottle of Tylenol Extra Strength Caplets, package of skinned chicken breasts, can of Green Giant peaches & cream corn, loaf of Mother's Own Crusty Bread, 1kg Atlantic Brown Sugar, 1 large bunch of green onions, 2 liters of Tropicana Orange Juice with no pulp, 1 package of Simons weiners, 1 liter of Maple Walnut ice cream, a bag of all purpose flour

Identify student in the class who have demonstrated high levels of concentration. Discuss what kinds of 'tools' we need to develop to successfully concentrate on our craft.

Concentration Circles

1. Divide into 3 groups. Make a circle.
2. This is a variation on word association. Once person begins with a word. The person to the right repeats the word, adds one of their own and passes it on to the third person.
3. The third person repeats the first word, then second and adds one of their own. The cycle moves on to the fourth person and so on.
4. In the process, if an actor forgets, stumbles or pauses too long on a word they must leave the circle.

The Argument

1. Divide into 2's.
2. Face once another. Begin an improvised argument involving both of you. Talk simultaneously and without pause, each of you developing and keeping their mind on their own reasoning.
3. No body contact at all. Keep arguing and don't stop until your instructor tells you to!
4. It might be effective to divide the class into 2 sections and allow one half of the students to observe the other.

The Lesson

Introduce this exercise with experiences had or observed regarding "teaching". How often have you made a presentation when a student - or student - have attempted to disrupt the class?

1. Divide the class into 4 groups. Give each group a copy of some sort of dry text book. Mark various sections of the book where they are expected to present.
2. Students are to read from this book for at least 2 minutes.
3. While the reading is going on the rest of the class tries to break the concentration of the reader. They may reasonable do anything they can - except physically interfere with the individual. The goal is to divert the reader's attention from the article.
4. At the end of the experience the reader must close the book and explain - uninterrupted - what it was they were reading. Their explanation will determine if the reader or the class was successful.
5. In each case the group should discuss if the reader (actor) remained focused on their purpose and if they were able to sustain their concentration?